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The King Besieged

by Jack Hope

Standing upon one of the treeless peaks that surround California's Mineral King Valley, surveying the wilderness of the southern Sierra Nevada, provokes a certain spirit of uneasiness. The feeling is not unpleasant, but is disturbing only in the sense that it is one that we aren't used to dealing with.

I don't think it's the height that brings about the sensation, or the vast abyss that suddenly opens in front of you. Nor is it simply a product of the powerful alpine panorama. More than anything else, it seems to stem from a feeling of inappropriateness on the onlooker's part. But then—perched atop a mass of granite that thrust its way from the earth's crust 30 million years ago; gazing down from a height of 12,500 feet upon an incredible array of jumbled, snow-streaked peaks, alpine meadows, and evergreen-covered mountainsides; recalling a passage from the guidebook, which notes that 200 million years earlier this land rested at the bottom of a sea—what can you do that "fits" the occasion? Take a picture? Identify wildflowers?

I don't mean to imply that Mineral King (commonly known as Mineral King National Game Refuge) is unique. In fact, most of the Sierra Nevada contains similar features—the mountains and the giant sequoias, the glacial lakes, and the wide eyed mule deer. However, as wilderness (with the exception of a few hundred acres) it is at least exceedingly rare. For in the United States only about 2 per cent of our land falls into this "wild" category—about one-fourth the area now taken up by cities.

One of your first reactions to Mineral King is that you would like to show it to others who have not had the chance to see it. Your friends primarily, but others as well: a delegation of lawmakers, perhaps, or the boys who drive grocery carts around Manhattan. It seems that if more people could see such places, the job of caring for them would be much simplified—people would want to protect them for themselves, for their children, and for their friends.

There is some truth to this thought, but there is a great naïvete as well. For wilderness is by definition a perishable commodity. It can easily be loved to death in the attempt to display it to the greatest number of people. Building roads, for instance, to "make wilderness more accessible to the millions"—despite its democratic overtones—is self-defeating; something like carving up Michaelangelo's statue of "David," so that each of us might own one splinter.

For another thing, not everyone looks at the land in the same way. Mineral King's 15,000 acres are regarded by different people as a setting for a beautiful photograph, a hike, a fishing trip, or as a place for the study of biology. Some see the terrain as ideally suited for a ski resort, while others welcome the wild country as a means of getting out of contact with other people for a few hours or a few days. There are those who classify the land and its creatures as "natural resources" to be used for the generation of income; and some who regard it as important in itself—whether or not it is seen, smelled, heard, touched, or tasted by humans—its own reason for being.

Each group has its own notion of what should, or should not, be done with the land, and as you might guess, these notions conflict at least as often as they coincide. Yet, within the past 20 years, each faction has come to regard itself as the champion of a cause called "conservation" (whether their real interest lies in hiking, in hunting, or in cutting trees). This is the situation at Mineral King, where, within the next few months, the proponents of one of these viewpoints will be awarded the privilege of shaping the future of this region according to their own conception of this popular term.

On the surface, it is not always clear whether a group's choice of the conservationist label is appropriate—whether it stems from a misuse of the dictionary, or whether it is, in fact,

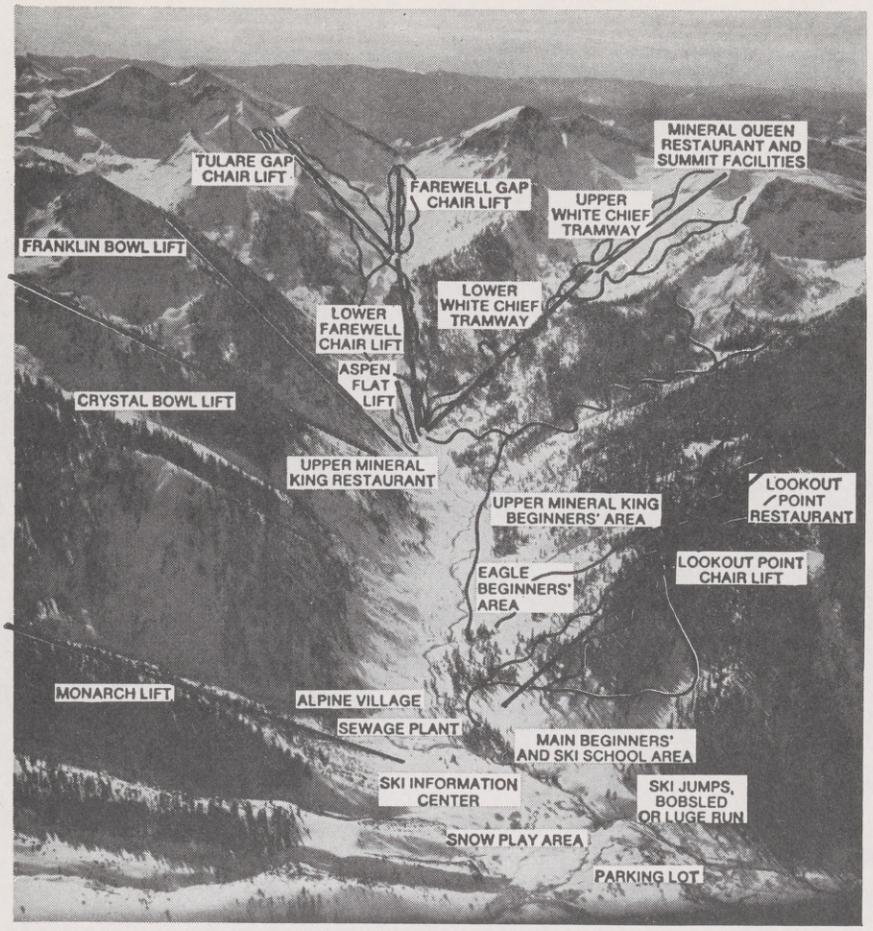


Civilization's inroads are modest at Mineral King. Hot showers, groceries, and local news are available to summer visitors at "the store" in Mineral King Valley.

Mineral King National Game Refuge looks much as it did five thousand years ago. The Forest Service and Walt Disney Productions plan a $35 million recreation resort for this area.

(Photo not shown)

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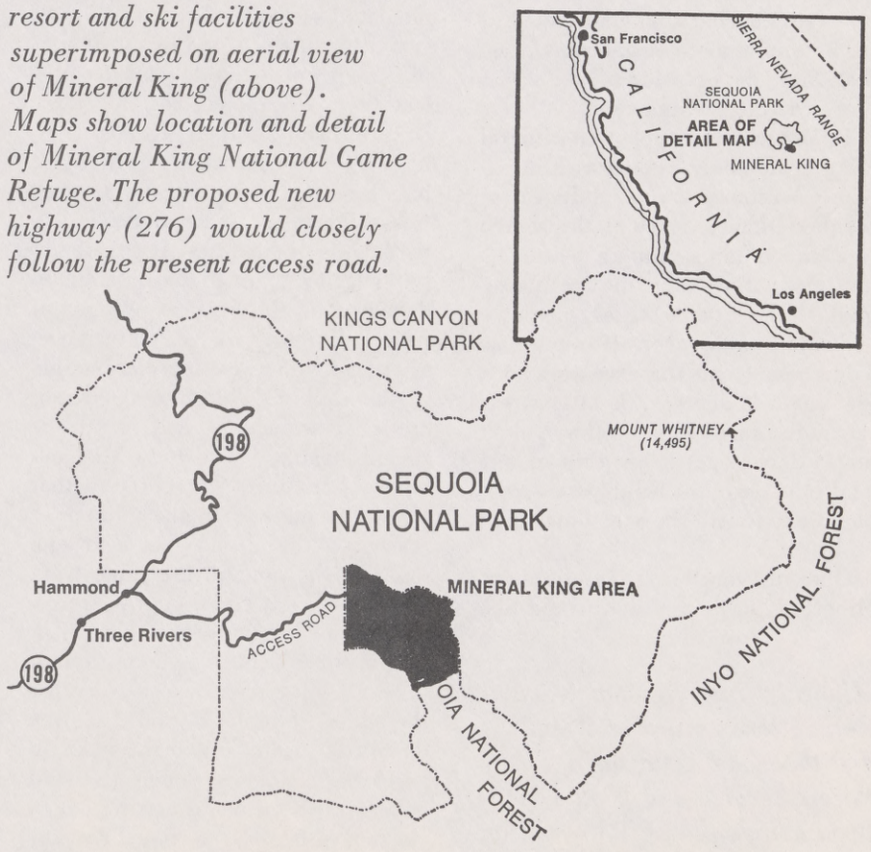
Seen from one of the trails leading from Mineral King Valley, a summer storm unfolds above the peaks of the Sierra Nevada. (Photo not shown)

This is not a new type of activity for the Forest Service, whose guiding principle of land management is that of "multiple use." What this term means in regard to the natural environment is that the Forest Service is sanctioned to be one degree less protective than is an agency such as the National Park Service. Thus, on the 187 million acres of public land administered by the Forest Service, a wide variety of activities are permitted, including lumbering, hunting, livestock grazing, mining—even some private cabin building.

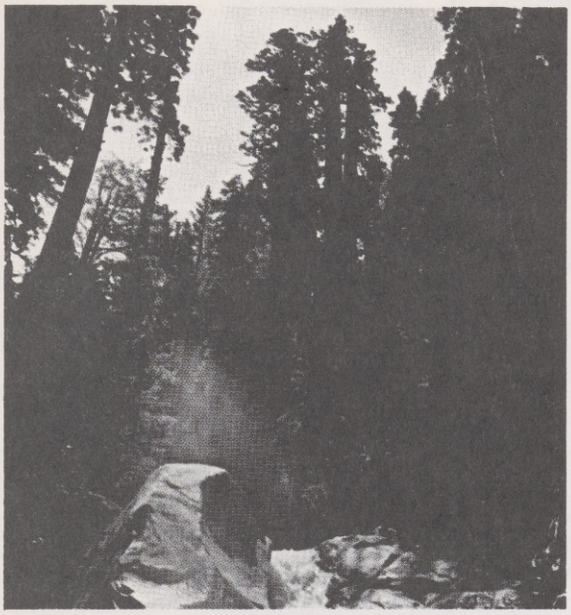
And within the last decade the focus of national attention upon the country's recreational potential, combined with the spiraling magnitude of the billion dollar recreation business, has "sensitized" the federal government's largest landholding bureaus to the task of accommodating a prodigious number of a product of a good public relations department, which knows that the word has a high "acceptance value." The story of Mineral King may be instructive in this regard; may serve as a prism through which the apparently single beam of "conservation" can be separated into its components for the purpose of closer examination.

In February, 1965, the Department of Agriculture's Forest Service issued a *Prospectus for a Proposed Recreational Development at Mineral King in the Sequoia National Forest.* The purpose of this rather stark little document was to solicit bids from private developers for the privilege of constructing and operating a year-round recreation resort within the Mineral King National Game Refuge, a 15,000 acre neck of Forest Service land protruding into the southern boundary of Sequoia National Park. In addition to serving as a wildlife refuge, the region is now used for a variety of activities—camping, hiking, fishing, and sightseeing.

Portions of the planned Disney resort and ski facilities superimposed on aerial view of Mineral King (above). Maps show location and detail of Mineral King National Game Refuge. The proposed new highway (276) would closely follow the present access road.



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On its descent from Mineral King into the San Joaquin Valley, the east fork of the Kaweah River leads through groves of giant sequoia, sugar pine, and incense cedar.

special recreation interests, ranging from motorboating to motorcycling and from skiing to skimobiling. Toward this end, the Forest Service has undertaken to make much of its domain available for a multitude of uses, and in the case of skiing, has leased public lands to commercial developers who now operate such well-known ski meccas as Aspen, Vail, and Sun Valley in the west; and Mt. Snow and Sugarbush in the east.

Thirty-seven of the 190-some ski areas on Forest Service land are located in California—more than in any other state. Nevertheless, that state's current population of about 19 million is growing rapidly; it is expected to reach about 25 million in 1976, and perhaps 40 million by the year 2000. The use of the state's outdoor recreation facilities—both winter and summer—is undergoing an even more rapid expansion. The Forest Service predicts that use of California's national forests for winter sports alone will climb from the present level of about 2 million annual visits to 6 million in 1976 and 12.4 million in 2000.

An interesting aspect of the country's recreation "boom" is the extent to which it is a middle-class (or at least a "non-lower" class) phenomenon. Participation in even the simpler forms of outdoor recreation calls for a certain income level. Gaining access to a national park or forest, for example, is frequently contingent upon automobile ownership. And such pursuits as skiing, motorboating, and the more elaborate forms of camping require a considerable investment to purchase and operate the necessary equipment, and perhaps to pay for the privilege of using it.

The typical ski-family in the western states, for instance, has an annual income of $9,500 ($2,000 above the average income for that area); an adult member of this family owns about $300 worth of ski equipment, and spends over $20 per day on his ski trips. Sporting-goods salesmen, restaurant owners, and motel operators are fond of these people.

In addition to their relative affluence, ski enthusiasts are generally well organized, vocal, and therefore influential, even though they make up only 1 to 2 per cent of the total population. And, like many special-interest groups, skiers have regular means of broadcasting their requests that new regions be opened to their sport—the many ski magazines, the political friends, and so on.

Influences of this sort play a part in the decisions made on what to do with the country's public land. Some twenty years ago, for example, the Forest Service decided to develop Mineral King Valley, hoping perhaps to relieve the pressure skiers were exerting to have other areas opened, such as the San Gorgonio wilderness in southern California.

But in 1949, when the first attempts were made to attract private capital to develop Mineral King, no bids were received, because the only access to the area was, and still is, a serpentine, twenty-five mile road leading from the San Joaquin Valley up into the Sierra Nevada range—somewhat difficult to drive during summer months and completely blocked with snow during the winter. Potential developers were not interested in building a ski resort that no one could get to. No sizable recreation complex could be installed without widening and straightening the roadway.

More than twenty lakes within Mineral King's boundaries were scooped from the granite of the Sierra Nevada by the grinding action of a glacial ice sheet.

(Photo not shown)

In addition, the road winds across eleven miles of Sequoia National Park before dead-ending within Sequoia National Forest at the small cluster of summer cabins and public campsites that make up Mineral King village. Thus, developers may have been intimidated by the legal and political complications of interfering with a road crossing land controlled by the National Park Service.

At the time the 1965 prospectus was issued, no solution to the access problem had been found; but in the 16 years that had elapsed since the first prospectus, knowledge had spread of the Forest Service's interest in the area. Learning of the intentions to develop the area's ski potential, ski clubs, developers, businessmen, and politicians in Tulare County (where Mineral King is located) began to regard the resort, along with its access road, as a real and desirable possibility. One hopeful developer (Walt Disney Productions) had speculatively purchased a small amount of private land in Mineral King Valley. Furthermore, the rapid increase in the number of California skiers had expanded the undertaking's potential support. Thus, in issuing the 1965 proposal, the Forest Service had some cause for believing that public and political support could be mustered for both the project and its necessary road.

The optimism was well founded. During the summer of 1965, the California state legislature voted to add a new highway to the state's road system. Highway 276, from the town of Hammond to Mineral King, would replace the old access road, would be kept snow-free by the state (the old access road was county maintained), and would ostensibly be wide enough to accommodate sufficient traffic at the proposed resort. The road is planned as a relatively straight, two- to three-lane highway, capable of handling about 1,200 automobiles

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per hour at speeds of about 50 mph. In addition, six bids were submitted to the Department of Agriculture for construction and operation of the recreation complex. These were narrowed to two, and finally, late in the year, a winning bid was announced. In December, Walt Disney Productions was chosen to carry out the Mineral King development and was awarded a 3-year permit to perform its initial studies of the region.

Up to this point, little opposition had been expressed to the project, except by local groups of outdoorsmen and by cabin owners in the Mineral King area who would be displaced by the development. National organizations that might normally oppose the area's commercial development were preoccupied with the problems of dam building in the Grand Canyon, cutting of redwoods (in the proposed Redwoods National Park), and other well-known issues. Some feared that opposition to the Mineral King ski resort would only serve to increase pressure by skiers to develop the San Gorgonio wilderness and were therefore reluctant to take a stand. Others, thinking outright opposition too late, felt that the best strategy was to try to limit the project's size. A few were even unsure of Mineral King's whereabouts, let alone its significance. But when the magnitude of the Disney development proposal was disclosed, the traditional champions of the natural environment—the Sierra Club, Wilderness Society, and National Parks Association—quickly realized that they were confronted with another major battle.

The Forest Service's original guidelines for the recreation complex were relatively modest: three or four ski lifts, parking for 1,200 automobiles, and resort accommodations for 100 overnight visitors—tempered by the warning that all facilities would have to remain "compatible with the aesthetic values of the area." The Disney firm, however, is known for doing things in a big way, and Mineral King is no exception. The original Disney plans called for a $35 million investment to include an alpine village, a heliport, a golf course, a reservoir-skating pond, swimming pools, an auto service station, two hotels, a 500-room dormitory, 1,200 cabins, a 20-acre parking lot for 2,500 autos, and ten restaurants within Mineral King Valley and on surrounding mountain peaks. In summer general sightseeing would be the main attraction; in winter skiing would bring as many as 20,000 visitors into the valley each day, from whence they would be whisked into the high country of the Sierra Nevada wilderness aboard 20 overhead lifts, which would radiate from the valley. Some of the lifts' towers would go beyond the boundary of Forest Service land and would be anchored in adjoining Sequoia National Park. Supplemental plans revealed the firm's interest in a facility, located well within Sequoia Park's Hockett wilderness area, that could accommodate cross-country skiers. Walt Disney Productions expects an annual income of about $23 million from the resort during the first years of operation, with this sum increasing thereafter as the area's popularity grows. The Disney plans also noted that "Mineral King's great natural beauty must be preserved at all costs."

With the plans before them, opponents of the development felt pressed by a twofold threat. First, they feared the immediate damage to the alpine environment that would result from construction of a roadway and a resort, and from the heavy human traffic. The prospect of bringing 2.5 million visitors annually into the heart of the mountain country conjures up pictures of tourists picking the ground clean of unusual rock fragments, wildflowers, evergreen cones, and other portions of the alpine landscape; of skiers watching the white wrappers of their candy bars slowly floating to the ground after being tossed from the gondola of one of the aerial tramways; of erosion caused by construction activity; sewage pollution in the Kaweah River; and of the intrusion of automobiles, buildings, and large numbers of visitors upon the mountain landscape. In addition, project opponents object to the disregard by the Forest Service and Walt Disney Productions for Mineral King's current status as a national game refuge. Among naturalists aware of the development plan a favorite parlor game during the past few months has been the casting of Smokey, the Forest Service bear, and Disney's Mickey Mouse in Simon Legree roles—dispossessing their fellow creatures in order to build the Mineral King resort ("Smokey strikes again!").

The Forest Service is well aware of the potential danger to the Sierran landscape posed by the planned resort. They note that "Mineral King can 'stand' development to only a certain level," but also contend that "Walt Disney Productions does not plan, and the Forest Service would not permit, a development beyond that capacity threshold." But "capacity threshold" lends itself to subjective interpretation, and what the term means to the Forest Service is apparently quite different from the meaning given by most of those opposed to the project. To the former group, it probably means a general attempt to keep ecological damage to a minimum, whatever the level of construction and human visitation. The latter define the phrase in terms of wilderness, in which case the threshold will likely be exceeded on the resort's first day of operation.

In a way, these differences of opinion reflect the essential conflict between the protectionist groups such as the Sierra Club and those more inclined toward development. Both are aware of the perplexing problem of providing recreational opportunities for a population that doubles every forty years, while our static land supply stubbornly refuses to expand despite the demands placed upon it. However, their approaches to this situation are quite different. The development faction seems to feel that the way to alleviate this difficulty is to make increasing portions of the environment easily accessible to the current demands of the population so as to spread the "visitor impact" over a larger land area. (Walt Disney Productions, for instance, notes that "the value of much public land . . . is lost because the land is inaccessible.") On the other hand, the protectionists view the growing number of claims upon the land as reason to stiffen its protection, perhaps to the point of rationing its use. This "pinch," they hope, will forcefully focus the attention of hunters, highway engineers, wilderness lovers, and resort builders on the real source of the growing real estate shortage, and will elicit stronger public sentiment to deal with the problem before the remaining public land is consumed.

From the viewpoint of the Sierra Club and its allies, the greatest threat

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posed by the Disney recreation complex and its access road is the influence these developments would exert upon the future protection of wild lands of the southern Sierra Nevada surrounding Mineral King Valley. Most of this land—in both Sequoia National Forest and Sequoia National Park—meets the criteria for "formal" wilderness status as defined by the 1964 Wilderness Act, and is now being considered for legal protection according to the provisions of that act. However, the presence of a high-grade highway bringing millions of people into the heart of the region would probably diminish its wild character in short order, obviate the inclusion of this land within the wilderness system, and encourage less rigid protection of adjoining land. In addition, there is some fear that the presence of a high-standard road reaching halfway across the Sierra Nevada range will be used as a rationalization for extending the pavement another 30 miles to create a new trans-Sierra highway through one of the country's last enclaves of primitive landscape.

In a way, it is tempting to apply the philosophy of "conservation democracy," advocated by Gifford Pinchot and Theodore Roosevelt, to the Mineral King situation: "the purpose of Conservation is the greatest good of the greatest number for the longest time." This concept invariably underlies the arguments in nine out of ten land-use conflicts, but despite its seeming simplicity, it poses questions that cannot be readily answered. Who can say, for instance, whether a ski resort, a semideveloped campsite, or a primitive landscape will be of greatest benefit to people who have not yet been born?

Nevertheless, the concept stimulates some interesting speculations about the future. In the case of Mineral King, you might ask what needs will characterize Californians in 2068: The need for convenience or for diversity? For material comfort or challenge? For sociality or solitude? Which need will be most in demand and least in supply?

Even at present, there seems to be a considerable difference of opinion over the proper application of these democratic guidelines. Both the Forest Service and Walt Disney Productions maintain that a new high-standard roadway into the Mineral King country will represent an improvement over the current situation because it will permit the rapid influx of large numbers of visitors ("Many people wish to see and enjoy Mineral King but won't drive the present difficult road."). To this argument however, their opponents reply that the area's present function of providing general recreation is inherently more democratic, for it does not impose an admission fee upon visitors. They further contend that in terms of meeting California's most urgent recreational needs, the $35 million to be spent on the Mineral King project might be put to better use by expanding the recreational facilities available to the non-mobile population in, say, the Watts ghetto of Los Angeles.

Throughout 1966 and into early 1967, the Mineral King issue continued to be fought at a local level. In that time, proponents of the Disney project succeeded in gaining political support for the venture. In September of 1966, Walt Disney and California's governor, Edmund G. (Pat) Brown, flew into Mineral King by helicopter to survey the area. Thereafter, Brown made a short speech in which he described the proposed development in glowing terms: "I hope that ten years from today I can stand here with Walt Disney again and look around at the wonderland that will have been created," and assured his audience that "we are going ahead with the [access] road." The Brown administration applied for and received a $3 million federal grant to partially finance the road's construction; the California Highway Commission then voted to provide the remainder of the needed construction money (about $20 million) from the state's highway tax fund.

These actions did not pass unchallenged. California's State Highway Engineer, J. C. Womack, attacked the financing of the Mineral King road stating that the highway could proceed only "at the expense of other critical [road building] projects," and that the use of funds set aside for other construction would prove "very disruptive to previously approved planning and scheduling of projects in the Southern Counties group." State Assemblyman Alan Sieroty assailed the proposed destruction of natural landscape, stating that the plans for the Mineral King road were "atrocious," then added: "It would be . . . outrageous for the Reagan administration [Reagan was elected in 1966] to give away more than $20 million to facilitate a private venture when it has just cut the state Parks and Recreation budget . . . from $33 million to $1 million." In addition to this objection, two bills were introduced into the California state legislature in an attempt to block construction of the access road. Both died in committee before being brought to a vote.

By early 1967, although funding had been approved for the access road and its proposed routing established, and although newspapers in Tulare County were speaking as if the Disney resort was already a fact, the National Park Service had not yet granted permission for the road to cross eleven miles of Sequoia National Park on its way to Mineral King Valley. It is still unclear whether the Department of the Interior can legally grant permission for a road to cross a national park for non-park purposes, or whether this requires an act of Congress.

In any event, Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall disapproved of the new road. He noted that it would prove a "blighting influence" upon Sequoia Park, that blasting of rock and planned removal of eight million cubic yards of soil would scar park terrain, cause erosion and consequent siltation of the Kaweah River, pollute the air with auto exhaust fumes, pose a threat to giant sequoias and other large evergreens, and would, in general, compromise "park values." With a first-hand sensitivity to the proliferation of the nation's vast network of highways, (3.6 million miles worth) he commented that developers "will be more honored 25 years from now for the roads they do not build than for the roads they do," and suggested that the Forest Service and Disney Productions explore other means (such as an overhead monorail or tramway) of transporting sightseers and skiers into Mineral King Valley to minimize destruction to the landscape.

To answer charges of road damage, the California Division of Highways commissioned biologist Richard J. Hartesveldt, an authority on giant sequoias, to study the ecology of sequoia groves surrounding the proposed roadway. The report's objectivity, however, has provided at least as much ammunition for opponents of the project as for its advocates,

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and each side has quoted and paraphrased the document upon numerous occasions.

As for Udall's proposal that a monorail or tramway be used to transport visitors into the resort, this plan was rejected by both Disney Productions and the Forest Service as being too expensive. The cost of installing such a system—unlike the tax-financed roadway—would be borne by the Disney firm.

By mid-year 1967, opponents of the development had finally managed to air some of their grievances to a national audience by means of articles printed in magazines published by the National Parks Association and the Sierra Club. Within these groups, the general feeling seems to be that the only way to provide Mineral King with adequate protection against commercial development is to make it a part of adjoining Sequoia National Park. In 1926, when Congress was wrestling with the problem of what to do with this area, the decision was made to award it to the Department of Agriculture in the belief that there were minerals remaining in and around Mineral King Valley that would become "locked up" if park status were granted. But since no mineral deposits have been discovered, there is a strong feeling now that these 15,000 acres should be given to the Department of the Interior.

This type of interdepartmental land transfer is invariably an unpopular procedure on the part of the donor agency, and is avoided by Congress whenever possible. Just now, the Forest Service is especially sensitive on this count for portions of forestland are being transferred from the Forest Service to the Park Service in order to establish a Redwoods Park in California and a Cascade Mountain Park in Washington. The history of transactions of this sort carries all the flavor of a range war between sheepherders and cattlemen, and while reading these accounts, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that the ownership of federal property rests with the public rather than with the managing agency.

By this time, Secretary Udall was finding it increasingly difficult to maintain his opposition to the access road upon which the success or failure of the development depends. A hint of behind-the-scenes pressure appeared when the Secretary indicated that he would need a great deal more support from leaders of the protectionist movement than they had given him. In addition, the open opposition to Udall's position had assumed formidable proportions. California's two senators, several representatives, lieutenant governor, many state legislators, and Los Angeles Mayor Yorty now stood solidly behind the Disney plans. Senator Thomas Kuchel, who can usually be counted on to champion the position of the Wilderness Society and the Sierra Club, reversed his role in the case of Mineral King and went so far as to write an article in a ski magazine praising the merits of the Disney firm and its proposed undertaking. Real estate speculators and businessmen in Tulare County, anxious to capitalize upon the anticipated influx of tourist gold, were beginning to make impatient noises. These were echoed by Tulare County politicians and newspaper columnists, and by Secretary of Agriculture Orville Freeman, all of whom viewed Udall's reluctance to approve the access road as an obstructionist tactic.

To add more fuel to the fire, Governor Reagan sent emissaries to persuade Secretary Udall to change his stand. Although Udall remained adamant, he was misquoted by a Reagan aide as having given his approval to the Disney project. The story that Udall had conceded, followed quickly by his denial, served only to heighten tension and to increase pressure for a decision.

Of the obstacles faced by Stewart Udall and his supporters, one of the most formidable is the intangible something which Walt Disney Productions calls the "Disney Image." For after being honored by a number of nature-oriented organizations, ranging from the National Audubon Society to the National Wildlife Federation; after thirty years of producing such films as *Bambi*, *Beaver Valley*, and *Nature's Half Acre*, it hardly seems possible that the Disney firm would consent to undertake a project that would in any way prove detrimental to the great out-of-doors. The common conception of the Disney orientation toward the natural world, as the Disney publicity states, is one of a "proven interest in conservation." As noted in the organization's proposal for the development of Mineral King, issued to the Forest Service: "The integrity and quality image of Walt Disney Productions is *already* pre-sold in the public mind." This seems to be the case, particularly in California, where considerable fame and fortune have come to rest since the establishment of the Disney empire in that state.

In July, 1967, the nature of the suspected pressure on Secretary Udall was made public. To the consternation of those who had labored to defeat the Mineral King proposal, it was revealed that through the complicated machinery of Washington diplomacy, the fate of Mineral King had become linked to the ongoing negotiations between various federal agencies and the state of California over the size and location of the proposed Redwoods National Park. Apparently, the Johnson administration felt that Governor Reagan would be more amenable to the installation of a national park in his state if he were offered certain concessions in return. One of several concessions offered the state was the administration's active support of the Mineral King development and its access road. The nature of this transaction was spelled out in a letter of June 22, 1967, from an administration spokesman, Phillip S. Hughes, Deputy Director, Bureau of the Budget, Executive Office of the President:

> Following is the Administration position on a number of items over and above the provisions of S. 1370 [the redwoods bill introduced by Thomas Kuchel]. . . . The Administration is prepared to implement these provisions immediately. . . .

The Mineral King proposal is listed under a section labeled "Other Conservation Program Actions."

> 6. *Mineral King*
>
> It is in the interest of the Administration and the State that the Mineral King area . . . be . . . developed. . . .
>
> The Department of the Interior has been requested to consider issuance of a permit jointly to the Deparment of Agriculture and the State of California for a two-lane road through the Park [Sequoia] to provide access to Mineral King. . . .

The letter's contents provoked a volley of angry protests from the project's opponents. Senator Lee Metcalf (Montana) assailed the administration's intention to "override the Secretary's [Udall's] best judgement" as raising "fundamental questions of public policy, precedent and

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equity." Anthony Wayne Smith, General Counsel and President of the National Parks Association stated that the Forest Service had "put to auction a priceless asset [Mineral King] belonging to the American people. . . ." California Congressman Phillip Burton perhaps best summarized sentiment against the maneuver when he angrily labeled the Mineral King-Redwoods Park trade as "a desperate effort to pay the high political price needed to get along with California's new governor" and bemoaned the fact that the executive branch "promises to pressure the National Park Service into compromising the integrity of Sequoia National Park by accommodating the opening wedge for massive development of Mineral King."

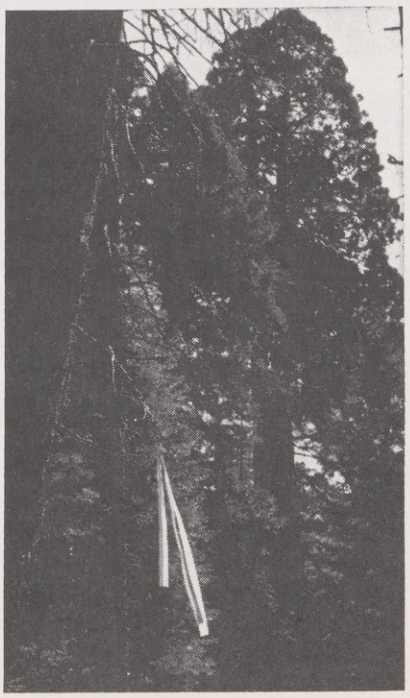
Whatever the processes by which pressure was exerted, Burton's fears were apparently justified and the intent of Hughes' letter carried out. In December, a high-level Mineral King meeting was called. Attendants in favor of the project included: Secretary of Agriculture Freeman, California Senators Kuchel and Murphy, Congressman (and former Olympic decathlon champion) Robert Mathias, and for the administration, Phillip Hughes. Attendants opposed: Stewart Udall. Shortly after the conference, Freeman issued a press release announcing that the right-of-way for a road through Sequoia Park was being prepared by the Interior Department and that the Disney development would proceed as planned.

From the point of view of the project's supporters, it probably would have looked better if the release had come from the Department of the Interior with Secretary Udall's blessing. This was not the case, however. To this day, Udall has not voiced support of the access road, leading to the conviction that this decision was predetermined by the administration. Even so, the Secretary was for a time, nobody's favorite. At a press conference in which he was criticized for "his" decision, Udall retorted that things might have been different had preservation groups spent more of their time writing to Orville Freeman than to him.

The Mineral King development is now within one step of realization. But this last step has proven time consuming. For in the year that has elapsed since Orville Freeman's announcement, the Forest Service and National Park Service — never the friendliest of "sister agencies"—have failed to reach agreement on the dimensions of the proposed access road crossing Sequoia National Park.

The delay has proven helpful to the more tenacious of the project's opponents; has given them time to begin legal investigations and to renew efforts to gather public support. During the past five months, two to three thousand signatures have been added to an antidevelopment petition circulated by the Sierra Club, network television stations have hauled their cameras into the Sierra Nevada to cover a "hike-in" staged in opposition to the project, and students from UCLA have pulled up and burned survey stakes marking the location of the proposed access road. Some of the more militant even plan to picket Disney films and to stage "lie-ins" in front of highway department bulldozers if construction begins, as scheduled, next summer.

It seems that the era of modern conservation weaponry is upon us. Whether or not this will aid the case for Mineral King will depend on public opinion and on the orientation of the new President-elect toward the issue. Resolution of the conflict will not be long in coming.



A surveyor's flag in Sequoia National Park marks the proposed location of the Mineral King access road.

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Out of Date - one of first articles

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